

Handling Trumps

Mini-lesson – May, 2026

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Declarer Play

You hold the following nice hand:

♠ A Q J 8 7 ♥ J 5 4 3 ♦ A 8 3 ♣ A

After opening 1♠, you hear partner give a simple raise, and you jump straight to game. The bidding having gone as follows, West leads the Q♦:

<i>South (you)</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>
1♠		2♠	
	Pass		Pass
4♠			
	All pass		

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Make a Plan!

This is what you see when dummy comes down:

♠ K 10 9 6

♥ 6 2

♦ K 6 4

♣ 8 7 5 4

♠ A Q J 8 7

♥ J 5 4 3

♦ A 8 3

♣ A

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Count Your Losers

- First of all, *as always before playing anything*, you **make a plan**
- Start by **counting your losers**, the normal strategy in a suit contract
- Remember, it is best to count losers from the perspective of the hand with the long trumps (generally declarer)
- Your losers here are zero in ♠s, four in ♥s, one in ♦s, and zero in ♣s = **five** in total, two too many

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Eliminating Losers

- What can you do with those ♥ losers?
- You don't have a long suit in dummy you can set up to discard losers from your hand
- But dummy *does* have a couple of good features for you – four trumps and ♥ shortness
- Thus, your plan should be to trump two of your ♥ losers in dummy, thus losing only three tricks in all

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When to Pull Trumps

Since you have quite a few trumps in dummy, should you maybe pull one or two rounds of trumps first?

No, not even one!

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Delay Pulling Trumps

- Let's see why
- Start by winning the K♦ at trick one in dummy and lead a low ♥ towards your hand
- A defender will win this trick, and if the defence is alert, they will see what your plan is and try and stop you ruffing in dummy *by leading a trump*
- You can win this ♠ lead in either hand and play another ♥
- A second round of trumps will not hurt you because you will still have two more trumps in dummy to deal with your two losing ♥s

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The Full Deal

♠ 4	♠ K 10 9 6	♠ 5 3 2
♥ A 10 8 7	♥ 6 2	♥ K Q 9
♦ Q J 10 9 2	♦ K 6 4	♦ 7 5
♣ K 6 3	♣ 8 7 5 4	♣ Q J 10 9 2
	♠ A Q J 8 7	
	♥ J 5 4 3	
	♦ A 8 3	
	♣ A	

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If You Play a Trump Early

- If you had played *even one trump* before starting ♥s, East could win the ♥ lead and lead a second trump
- Trumps break 3-1 and West discards on the second round of trumps. Your only hope now would be that East could *not* get in to play a third round of trumps
- But you can see from the deal above that East can easily win the second ♥ lead and make the killing play of her last ♠
- Now you are left with only one trump in dummy, and thus three ♥ losers to go along with your sure ♦ loser – one down!
- “Oh dear! Sorry partner”

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Key Points

- **Make a plan and allow for what could go wrong if the defenders are on the ball**
- ***As a defender*, try and see what declarer is planning to do and see if you can thwart her**
- **It's a general rule that if declarer is *not* pulling trumps right away, then you probably should be!**

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